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ABSTRACT

The formation of hypotheses and generation of a theory to explain and predict the outcomes of educational reforms based on the concept of school reform cycles is the purpose of this paper. Two complementary hypotheses are proposed to explain the success or failure of educational reforms. The first hypothesis is based on an inverse relationship between restructuring and allocation of power and resources. It states that reforms requiring the most extensive restructuring in education, government, and/or society have the least possibility of enduring. The second hypothesis, based on unresolved societal problems, states that reforms will recur if the problem requires a restructuring in education, government, and/or society that cannot be accomplished. An overview of educational reform in the United States, such as movements to change school accreditation requirements, student evaluation, teacher pay plans, and resource allocation, is presented to test the hypotheses. The discussion supports the usefulness of the hypotheses in generating theory to predict the success of future reform efforts. (21 references) (LMI)

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HISTORY AND POLITICS IN STATE ACCOUNTABILITY REFORM

A paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association

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HISTORY AND POLITICS IN STATE ACCOUNTABILITY REFORM

It's another Commission on Accountability Reform. I've seen it before and I'll see it again. And yes, this too will pass.

Reform of state accountability systems or performance/ assessment systems should be viewed as one aspect of an overall pattern of recurring school reforms in American education (Joyce, 1990). This very topic was the subject of an invited address to AERA at the 1989 annual meeting. In that address Larry Cuban, stated that education was "Reforming, Again, Again, and Again." If we know that we are on a repetitive treadmill why can't we stop? Why can't we implement meaningfully educational reforms?

The purpose of this paper is to propose a theory that explains the observations made about recurring educational reforms. The theoretical concepts extend and build upon the ideas of Larry Cuban and provide testable hypotheses that can be used to examine the larger recurring national patterns of school reform, as well as the smaller scale state or school system patterns. It is hoped that the proposed theoretical framework can be used to predict the fate or "adoptability" of any given reform. Then, just maybe, we won't keep repeating the mistakes of the past and reforms can take hold rather than coming back again, again, and again.

RECURRING SCHOOL REFORMS: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY, A SPECIAL CASE.

Scores of writers have observed that educational reforms recur with all too few becoming institutionalized. This is not to say that the educational system of the United States in 1790 is the same educational system present in 1990. Some educational reforms have taken root and changed the shape of our society. Yet other reforms, have come and gone and reappear in various guises over and over again. These reforms just never seem to take root. Cuban (1990) cites a number of authors making similar observations and develops an analysis of three examples of recurring reforms: teacher-centered instruction, academically-oriented versus practically-oriented curriculum, and centralizing versus decentralizing administrative authority.

Making the same observations as Cuban on educational reform, but from a different perspective, Joyce (1990) and his colleagues point out the various goals that different historic reform movements have pursued over the course of time.[1] Concluding his analysis of the many school reform movements and their associated goals Joyce states that:

> *Each of the innovative reform movements attempted to achieve an important goal... . Not one of the innovative reform movements has yet achieved its goal. Each has met resistance in one form or another, and in fact, the movements have served as forces of resistance to each other.*(p. 57).

The fact that each reform movement acts as a resistor to other movements, partially explains why the various reform

[1]For a brief discussion of the history of educational reform movements see Joyce pp. 36-59.

movements have so little cumulative effect and tend to cancel each other out over time (Goodlad, 1987). Changes in school accountability are not immune to this process. Joyce positions the current school accountability reforms within the context of these larger historical movements and changes. The newest and latest of the reform movements, most often called the school performance movement, is now receiving the widest possible attention. Joyce notes that this movement

> *...is the logical extension of the industrial model of the school. It is based in part on the desire to make schooling more efficient and to hold teachers and educators accountable for the results of their efforts. It employs many techniques originally developed in industrial or military applications of systems technology... . In this sense the competency orientation is futuristic. Even futuristic movements have historical roots, however, and the antecedents of the performance-oriented movement can be most clearly discerned in the years since 1940. (p. 55)*

The 1980's wave of proposed performance-oriented school reforms represents the largest introduction of state legislative initiatives, commission reports, and public attention to ever descend on the educational community at one time (Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1990). Yet the Center for Policy Research in Education's review of these performance-based reforms finds the proposed reforms really have been only minimally enacted or institutionalized. As in most reform movements, few of the espoused goals have established themselves (Firestone, et. al., 1990).

Som f the current educational reforms, including those in accountability, seem to be going the way of those preceding them.

Scott Thompson, executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, recently observed that all of the activity following the release of *A Nation At Risk* may not have made much difference!

IS THE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL REFORM CYCLES IMPORTANT?

That some reforms take root and others do not, raises a basic question: **Does it matter that some reforms recur but do not establish themselves in education?** If the answer is in the affirmative, then **what accounts for these patterns?**

If failed school reforms were just random selections from a total reform package, or even if failed reforms were for some reason ones that just did not catch the attention of the times, then perhaps this issue could be dismissed. Dismissed like the "Edsel" or any other product that can not compete successfully in the marketplace of ideas. However, if there is a pattern to failed reforms, then analysis of that pattern could prove useful. Failed reforms help in understanding the history of school reform, but also in predicting the fate of current and future reforms.

Such knowledge could prove important, as Cuban (1990) noted:

> *...the stakes for policymaking are high because such questions about why reforms failed in the past and why they return go to the heart of present policy debates over whether federal, state, and district mandates to alter schooling will ever get past the classroom door.(p. 3)*

More often, the results of school reform are not changes in classroom teaching practices, but school reform results in new slogans, new tests, or new objectives. Sometimes school reform can lead to higher

pay or new pay scales. But most often, the fundamental business of schools goes on unchanged.

> *Seldom are the deepest structures of schooling that are embedded in the school's use of time and space, teaching practices, and classroom routines fundamentally altered even at those historical moments when reforms seek those alterations as the goal.(Cuban, 1990, p. 9)*

What is the pattern to failed reforms and why do some reforms take hold, while others fail, only to later recur[2]?

WHY DO SOME REFORMS FAIL AND THEN LATER RETURN, WHILE OTHERS TAKE HOLD?

Answering three questions will help in understanding the cycle of educational reform. First, what triggers educational reform movements? Second, what are the patterns of educational reforms? Third, what differentiates reforms that take root from those that recur?

What Triggers Educational Reform Movements?

Over the course of American history, numerous educational reforms have been proposed . Cuban, Goodlad and others maintain that a wave of educational reform is triggered when conflicting values emerge in society. Changing economic, social, or demographic conditions precipitate situations that cause swings in public opinions and beliefs. These changing conditions "...become transformed by

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[2]Not every reform which fails to take hold reoccurs. The purpose of this article is to discuss several that do.

media and political coalitions into pressure on schools to change... ." (Cuban, 1990).

Public education legally has been organized to be responsive to changing pressure. These pressures result in changes in educational policy, directions, and goals by local lay boards of education. Pressures come from many groups: parents, teachers, administrators, taxpayers, academics, politicians, students, the media, and others. Although many would maintain that schools are slow to react to change and pressure, eventually they do react. Goodlad (1987) notes that "While not closely coupled, the educational system might well be described as responsive -- that is, dominant concerns and values in the surrounding society get built into the functioning of schools." (p. 7)

The United States has a long tradition of turning to the public schools for solutions to problems that plague the society. Many researchers hypothesize that the public believes and relies upon schools as the mechanism to bring about societal change (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Guthrie, 1987). Regardless of why the public turns to schools, turn it does. The public expects schools to save society. The value conflict may be whether students need to learn more science or math, attend schools with children of various races, learn methods of contraception, or be indoctrinated with values hostile to the use of illegal drugs. As long as the public pays the bills, public schooling is going to respond to pleas from the society for assistance and help. Response requires changes in the status quo to meet the newly expressed needs. Shifting values in the larger society trigger school reform movements.

What Are The Patterns Of Educational Reforms?

No matter where or how a given reform movement begins, a reform movement must put forward a goal or goals and a

corresponding set of proposed reform actions to achieve those goals. Examining the major educational reforms in the United States indicates that at least one or more of five fundamental questions must be addressed.

1. Who will be taught?
2. What learnings should occur?
3. How should learning occur?
4. How will one know what has been learned?
5. How much educational funding is needed to bring about the desired learning and how is that funding to be raised?

Each educational reform movement's recommendations can be depicted as an answer to one or more of these questions. The five questions can be used, as a classification schemata to describe and analyze commonalities and patterns in the various reforms and their associated movements. Interestingly, these questions do not differ radically from those of Claubaugh and Rozycki (1989), Cuban (1987) or those identified by the White House Conference on Education in 1955 (Hillway, 1961).

The current performance-based reform movement sets a primary focus on questions two and four. To some extent, and in some states, question five has been addressed also. The school-performance movement prides itself in not mandating answers to question 3. In fact the movement sees intrusion into this area as counter productive to an effective outcome-based model.

Contrast the beliefs and approaches of the performance-based movement with that of the progressive movement embracing the tenets of John Dewey. The progressives were concerned primarily with question three: "How should learning occur?" That concern and the changes in emphasis that progressives placed on the "how" of learning, eventually would become the movement's undoing. Allegations were raised about what student learnings should have

occurred, or more precisely, the lack of student basic skill knowledge, especially in reading (Chamberlin & Chamberlin, 1942).

Joyce (1990) and his colleagues point out that progressivism in schools was blamed as a source for the major national problems in reading. He notes critics accused progressivism in schools of letting students fritter

> *away valuable time on such nonessential activities as field trips... . While the (progressives) protested that Dewey's conception of a progressive educational system had almost never really been implemented in the public schools, their voices went unnoticed amid the general hue and cry. Progressive education had become a bad word.(p. 45)*

The nation perceiving a national problem in reading and basic skills, would turn to the schools to solve this problem. Whether the problem truly existed, and whether the next movement succeed in solving a problem or non-problem, is not the purpose of this section. The purpose is merely to illustrate that reform movements and the ideas they espouse can be categorized and studied through this rather simple five question system. The five questions are a pattern that all movements address in some form -- the questions form the pattern. Responses to the questions distinguish one movement from another.

What Differentiates Reforms That Take Root From Those That Recur?

How the various reform movements answer the five questions illustrates their proposed solutions to deep value conflicts in society. Society has looked to the schools to help resolve these value conflicts. "They are dilemmas that require political negotiation and compromises among policymakers and interest groups." (Cuban, 1990, p. 8)

The success of a reform depends on getting broad consensus among differing philosophical factions (Claybaugh & Rozycki, 1989). A proposed reform can take root most easily when it does not involve a substantial value conflict in society. Reforms take hold when they pose no threat to any powerful groups in society. On the other hand, if a proposed reform directly addresses one of the five questions and involves a deep value conflict in society, then it will face great difficulties in establishing itself.

CAN THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF EDUCATIONAL REFORMS BE PREDICTED?

Two complimentary hypotheses can explain the success or failure of educational reforms. The first hypothesis explains which reforms will take root and which will not. The second hypothesis explains which of the reforms that do not take root will recur.

Hypothesis One -- Restructuring and Inverse Power/Resources: *The probability of an educational reform taking root is inversely related to the amount of restructuring in either power or resources[3] that is required from:*

1) The educational community,
2) The governmental community, and/or
3) The total society.

Thus it is easier to restructure education than federal, state, or local governments. It is easier to restructure education than to reallocate resources among governmental sub-units (how much of the funding pie will education get versus health, safety, and so forth.) Finally, it is far easier to restructure education than the total society. Those reforms requiring the most restructuring have the least

[3]Power refers to administrative control and resources to financial and/or human resources.

probability of taking root or lasting (see figure 1).

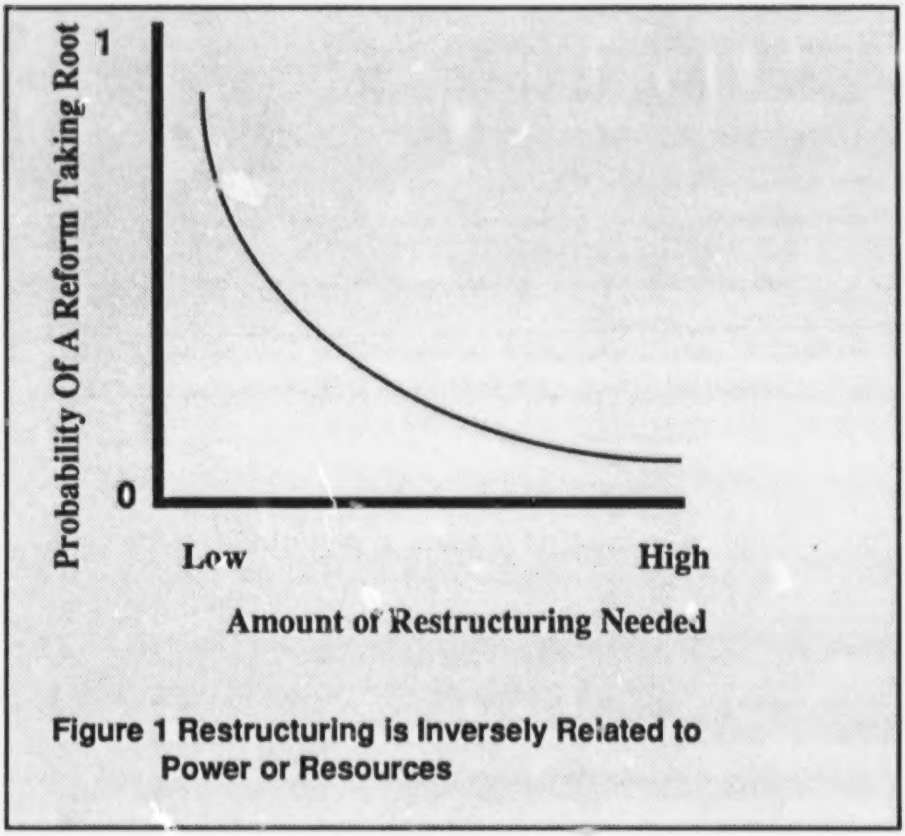

Figure 1 Restructuring is Inversely Related to Power or Resources

When reforms do not take root, which ones will recur?

Hypothesis Two -- Unresolved Societal Problems: *A reform will recur in education at a different time and in a different guise, if the problem to be solved by the schools requires a restructuring in either education, government, and/or society that could not be accomplished. Failure to accomplish the needed restructuring leaves the original value conflict unresolved.*

Similar reforms are proposed over again at a later time to resolve the original conflict.

Several different educational reforms, from several different time periods, will test the theory. Currently, a performance-based movement is in vogue. Since the early 1980's, performance-based reforms embrace such concepts as: 1) student outcomes, usually taking the form of increased graduation requirements, or increased or changed testing requirements, 2) school inspections/visitations/ or accreditation requirements, 3) teacher pay or career ladder changes, and 4) resource allocation/reallocation.

Increasing Graduation Requirements.

Increases in graduation requirements addresses itself directly to question 2, "What learnings should occur?" Those learnings have been translated in 45 states to definitions or redefinitions of the requirements students need to graduate. In each case there was an increase in graduation requirements. Increasing graduation requirements was an educational reform that was not difficult to adopt or take root. Firestone, et al. (1990) indicate that these new requirements often confirmed existing practices -- that is, school systems had begun increasing graduation requirements before the state initiatives began and therefore the state action merely confirmed earlier actions taken by the local systems. Further, general changes to the curriculum are processes familiar to educators and teachers. Periodic updates and revisions to curriculum and student requirements are unexpected over time tend to be fairly easy to implement. Such changes rarely require a restructuring of power and resources among educators, government, or the larger society.

These observations support Hypothesis One. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that the changes in graduation requirements led to changes in classroom behaviors for either students or teachers.

The ways of teaching or the "deep structures" Cuban (1990) spoke of are not adjusted when graduation requirements increase.

Changes In Testing Requirements.

Changes in testing requirements are a natural consequence of curriculum changes. Once a reform is rooted, educators and the public want assurance that the new curriculum is effective. Effectiveness usually involves measuring learning. A new test or new set of "test-like" indicators emerge.[4]

Joyce (1990) notes a deep and long-held American belief in a common core of learnings. This belief is traceable to the founding of the common school. Hirsch (1983) called his reintroduction of this concept "cultural literacy." The general public's acceptance of any common core of learning, necessitates the measuring of that common core as well as other outcomes of the curriculum. The most frequent requested measurements are standardized testing (i.e., a measurement administered under uniform conditions), and, for those interested in how society is doing on a common core of learnings, comparisons to "national norms" seems to them to be desirable. Whether normed or criterion referenced, Cuban (1990) comments that standardized testing in some form becomes the "bureaucratic means for controlling what occurs in classrooms." Teachers and administrators accept this methodology so long as it does not disturb their status quo by having tests tied either to evaluation or compensation. Once again a reform, testing in this example, can be established with relative ease. Testing does not require redistribution of power. Testing does not require a

[4]Some states have indicator systems that go beyond traditional norm-referenced or criterion-referenced testing. These systems tend to monitor additional student outcomes and/or variables that have been associated with outcomes; such as race, mobility, poverty. Such data have been used to explain student achievement or band schools with similar characteristics. These more comprehensive indicator systems are fairly new in education.

redistribution of resources unless it is tied to evaluation or compensation systems. Testing, in itself, does not require changes in government or society and thus is not opposed by power groups within

either. Hypothesis One, Restructuring and Inverse Power/Resources is supported again.

School Inspections Or Accreditations.

Another concept the performance-based movement advocated is school review-inspection or accreditation. Accreditation and school inspection have a long history in education and other professions. Accreditation in performance-based reforms usually focuses on outcomes of education rather than the processes or resources needed by education (Saterfiel & Woodruff, 1985). Even in such performance-based systems, lack of accreditation is rare, just as in the earlier process-oriented systems.

Cuban (1990) cites a number of studies to propose a tacit understanding between administrators and teachers concerning standardized tests and school inspections. This agreement is needed if the school is to remain a credible institution in everyone's eyes, but especially so in the eyes of taxpayers and parents.

> *Thus, a bargain is struck over the degree of inspection, how it is carried out, and its consequences (often encased in a contract when unions are present); infrequent and procedurally protected inspection is exchanged for teacher support. (p.11)*

Unseen and unspoken bargains are struck to protect the educational community of teachers and administrators from accreditation systems that could redistribute power or resources. Negotiated aggreements are the seen and spoken bargains between teachers and administrators. These agreements, as well, undermine school reform initiatives (Goldschmidt, Riley & Pitner, 1988)

Hypothesis One, Restructuring and Inverse Power/Resources, is confirmed yet again.

It should also be noted that a comprehensive and independent accreditation system capable of in-depth analysis of outcomes, on a meaningful time scale, would be a sizable logistical operation. It would also require extensive personnel and resources. Even if Cuban's unspoken bargains could be avoided, power and resources must be reallocated to implement fully a comprehensive accreditation system. According to this theory opposing forces would move against such a system. No where in the country is such a comprehensive system currently implemented.

Teacher Pay And Career Ladder Changes.

By 1982, the general educational reform movement resulted in proposed career ladders and merit pay systems in all fifty states and the District of Columbia (Bellon, Bellon, Blank, Brian, & Kershaw, 1988). Much of the initial excitement and early legislation has slowly given way to further study, repealed legislation, or revisions. State activity has diminished significantly. What activity now exists seems to be at the individual school district level (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1988). Firestone, et al. (1990) analyzed these failures and commented that:

> *Career ladder arrangements are full of obstacles. They are expensive because, to prevent the conflicts that differentiation could cause among staff members, districts would have to raise all salaries. Career ladders are also troublesome because creating fair and reliable assessment instruments strains existing technology.*
>
> *Finally, the introduction of neophyte and mentor teacher functions can lead to a major redistribution of authority among teachers and between teachers and administrators. (p.78)*

Initially many states implemented teacher career ladder changes because the period from 1981 until 1984 was marked by rapid economic expansion. However, a downturn or slowdown in the economy dramatically impacts the resources available within education. In those school districts where Boards of Education have direct taxing authority, the Board is forced to determine how much of a tax burden the public will bear in financing reforms. The alternative is to disband longer-standing programs and use those funds to support the new program. The history of educational reform does not indicate that this is often the case. Where school districts do not have taxing authority, they must face the problem discussed previously or they must persuade the governmental funding agency to give them a larger allotment. When the entire source of funds decrease, then educational needs are pitted directly against other agencies of government in scramble for funds. Under these circumstances maintaining the proportion of funds given to each agency is the easiest way for governmental policymakers to avoid a major financial restructuring. It is easy to see why career ladders, with their long-term costs in a declining economy, and their additional need to restructure power relationships, can be abandoned. Hypothesis one, Restructuring and Inverse Power/Resources is supported again.

Resources Allocation/Reallocation

Performance-based reforms are often embraced because they are perceived as inexpensive. Current and recent national administrations postulated this view. The Heritage Foundation in its Fall 1989 Newsletter, *Educational Update*, reviews issues and court cases involving school finance. The editors note that the critical issues surrounding school finance could be summarized as:

> *...Is equality of funding the key to raising the standards of the worst schools? Until recently the discussion of education quality has centered*

> *on money and facilities, rather than outcome measurements of success. But now, the debate has shifted to results, as parents, businessmen and citizens become increasingly concerned that children are not being educated properly and that money is not the answer. Many of the education reform initiatives of the 1980's, such as, school-based management and alternative teacher certification, require little additional funding. ...virtually all studies of school performance, in fact, reveal that spending has had little bearing on student achievement... Some policy makers, however, are beginning to measure the performance of the schools and to hold the school directly accountable for results. Research demonstrates that these efforts will be far more successful than those that concentrate on salary levels and class size. (pp. 1-2).*

Whether one agrees or disagrees with the Heritage Foundation, the statement provides clear supporting evidence for hypothesis one, restructuring and inverse power/resources.

Cuban (1990) describes policymakers search for "efficient schooling" that will require no more resources or perhaps even less resources as a "secular grail" that has dominated many recurring reforms or ideas. Specifically, he cites vocational schooling and the use of classroom technologies such as film, radio, and instructional television. The need to make schools produce effective outcomes with limited resources underlies not only the performance-based movement but the much earlier scientific/industrial reform movements (Joyce, 1990).

Purkey and Novak (1984) and Toffler (1981) among others observe that schools have used a factory model throughout American history. How often one hears: "If only schools could be more like business: efficient and effective." Additionally, it is said: "If only

schools could produce a consistent product of quality." This obsession with a high quality outcome, efficiently produced at a low cost has truly become a search for the "secular grail" (Cuban, 1990). It is the search underlying hypothesis two. Constantly overlooked, however, is that schools are areas of learning not production. Learning is concerned with effectiveness rather than efficiency. If children are to learn to mastery, and if mastery is the desired outcome; then the time to mastery cannot be mandated as in an industrial model (Bloom, 1964, Bruner, 1960). Overlooking this rather elementary fact is convenient for policymakers. By attending to efficiency instead of effectiveness they abandon the notion of uniform student outcomes and efficiency as mutually compatible concepts. Such an abandonment requires significant financial restructuring to meet the needs of those who will not progress to mastery as fast as desired from an industrial or an efficiency low-cost perspective. To avoid meeting these needs is consistent and supportive of hypothesis one, restructuring and inverse power/resources: perhaps even more interestingly, it is supportive of hypothesis two, unresolved societal problems.

More recently education is concerned with students who do not make the performance outcomes. These students are referred to as at-risk. The needs of children like these are a constant throughout the history of education. Such needs assume critical proportions because of the current economic problems facing the county and the urgent need that all citizens be productive. Meeting the needs of such children cannot be done simply or at very low cost. If it could, it would have been done already!

Pilot projects in a few schools or other such special projects invariably require some restructuring and additional resources. Usually the government sponsors "seed" projects to determine program effectiveness. Yet very few of these programs thrive when funding is withdrawn. The pilot programs and the problems come back over and over again in various guises, since what is required to solve the problem will not or cannot be granted. In the words of a

high school teacher in New Jersey:

> *We've had Operation School Renewal, Operation Outward Bound, Operation Upward Bound and Action Bound. As soon as the federal funds fizzle out, the program fizzles out. (Thirteen-wnet, 1990)*

Refusing to grant the necessary resources for reform caused Clabaugh and Rozycki (1989) to remark that policymakers must have "... a serious belief in magic." How else would they expect reforms to occur without resources?

SUMMARY

Reforms that circumvent hypotheses one and two do so for extraordinary reasons. The most dramatic of these educational reforms occurred when the Supreme Court ruled in the Brown versus the Board of Education in 1954 that schools must be desegregated. Consequences of this ruling still impact this country. At the time it was rendered the ruling was not a popular mandate with local government, the federal government, or society in general . It was enforced with bayonets and prodded later with federal dollars.

A contrasting example happens, when a nation believes that the handicapped must be treated fairly. When many of the families in that nation have a handicapped member or are friends with a handicapped person, then addressing the issue becomes possible.

This paper theorizes that educational reform movements can be characterized by response patterns to five rather basic questions. Each educational reform movement becomes unique in the answers in forms to the five questions. Unfortunately, all reform movements have had little success in implementing the reforms the movements espouse. These failures are predictable from two mutually interacting

hypotheses. Using these two hypotheses equips researchers to examine the past with new eyes and prepare for the future with added clarity. These hypotheses provide a testable beginning to an issue of great consequence to education.

A characteristic of a successful theory is its ability to explain the past and predict the future. This theory explains the past; it will predict the future unless policymakers act differently. By interpreting the cycles of the past, reformers can marshal their energies and strategies in dealing with policymakers in order to avoid the pitfalls that have mired so many before them. If these hypotheses fail to teach, then Cuban's citation of Andre Gide will prove to be true--

> *Everything has been said before, but since nobody listens, we have to keep going back and begin again.*

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